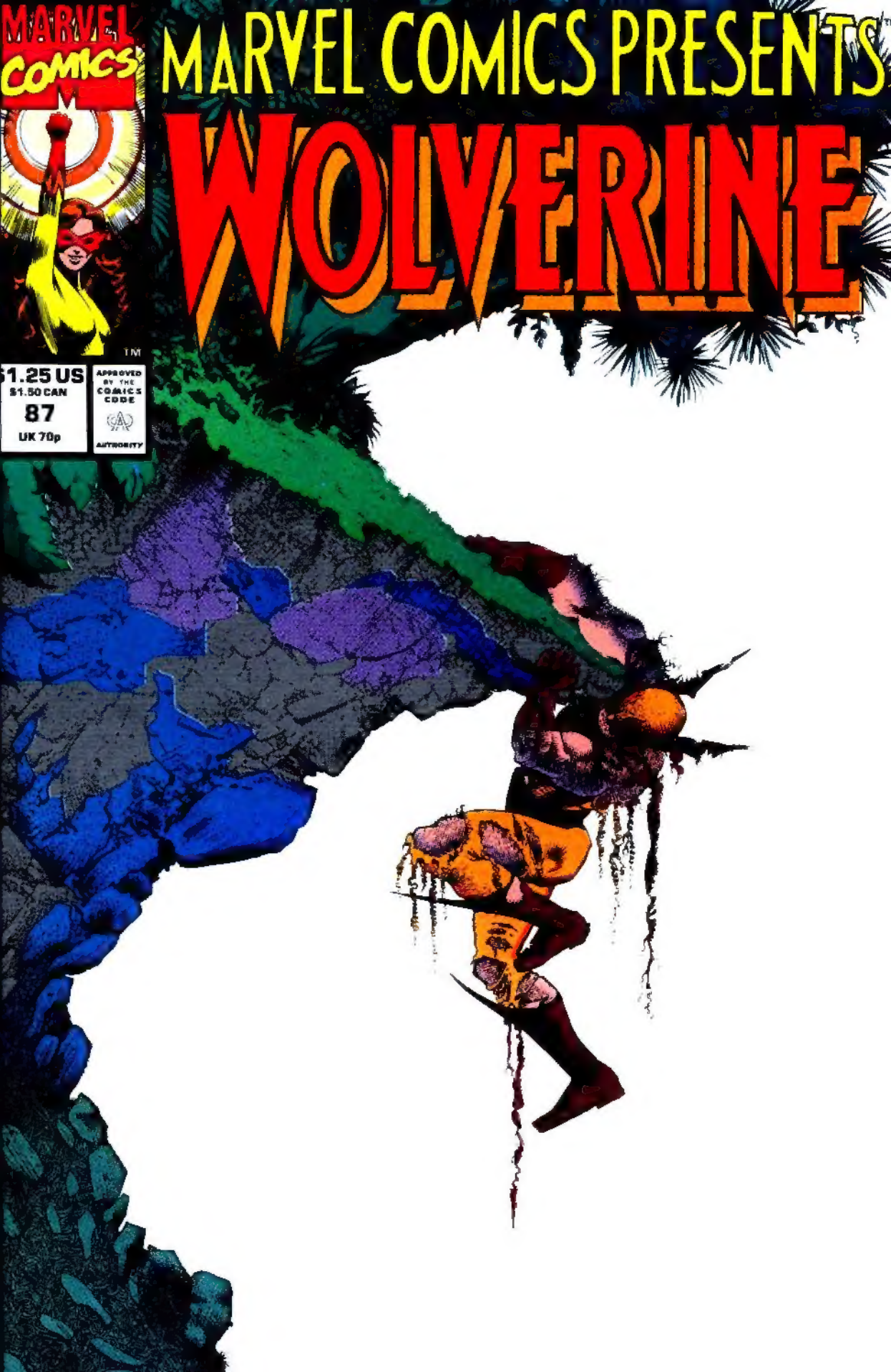
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Page

WOLVERINE 1

BLOOD HUNGRY
PART 3 OF 8
"THREE SCENTS"

Last issue, Wolverine came face to face with an old and deadly acquaintance. . .Cyber! The adamantium-skinned Cyber has drawn the first blood. . .will Wolverine draw the last?

Writer— PETER DAVID
Artist — SAM KIETH
Letterer — DAVID SHARPE
Colorist — GLYNIS OLIVER

Page

FIRESTAR 9

LIFE DURING WAR TIME
PART 6 OF 6
"SACRIFICE"

Previously, Firestar discovered the true nature of the mysterious Cross and his Arms of Salvation — and brought the whole operation crumbling down around him! Now, can Firestar escape Freedom Force and a vengeance-driven Cross to regain her former life?

Writers — MARCUS McLAURIN/MARIE JAVINS
Penciler — DWAYNE TURNER
Inker — CHRIS IVY
Letterer — DIANA ALBERS/DAVID SHARPE
Colorist — MARCUS McLAURIN

Page

BEAST 17

JUST FRIENDS
PART 3 OF 8

"IF THIS IS TUESDAY, IT MUST BE BELGIUM"

The Beast has travelled to Belgium in search of the woman he left behind when he joined the original X-Men. He wants to apologize for allowing Professor Xavier to tamper with her memories in order to prevent her from recalling his secret identity as young Hank McCoy. Will she remember him? Will she forgive him? For that matter, will he be able to even talk to her before he's char-broiled by the coils of. . . THE CONSTRICTOR?

Writer — SCOTT LOBDELL
Penciler — JAE LEE
Inker — TIM DZON
Letterer — TODD KLEIN
Colorist — MIKE THOMAS

Page

SHROUD 25

"TO TOUCH
THE DARKNESS"

Blinded by the branding iron of the mysterious Cult of Kali, the Shroud gained a mystical extra-sensory perception and the power to manipulate darkness. Pretending to be a criminal gang, the Shroud leads his band of misfits — the Night Shift — in his battle against the Los Angeles underworld!

Writer — ERIC FEIN
Penciler — RON WILSON
Inker — HARRY CANDELARIO
Letterer — DIANA ALBERS
Colorist — KEVIN TINSLEY

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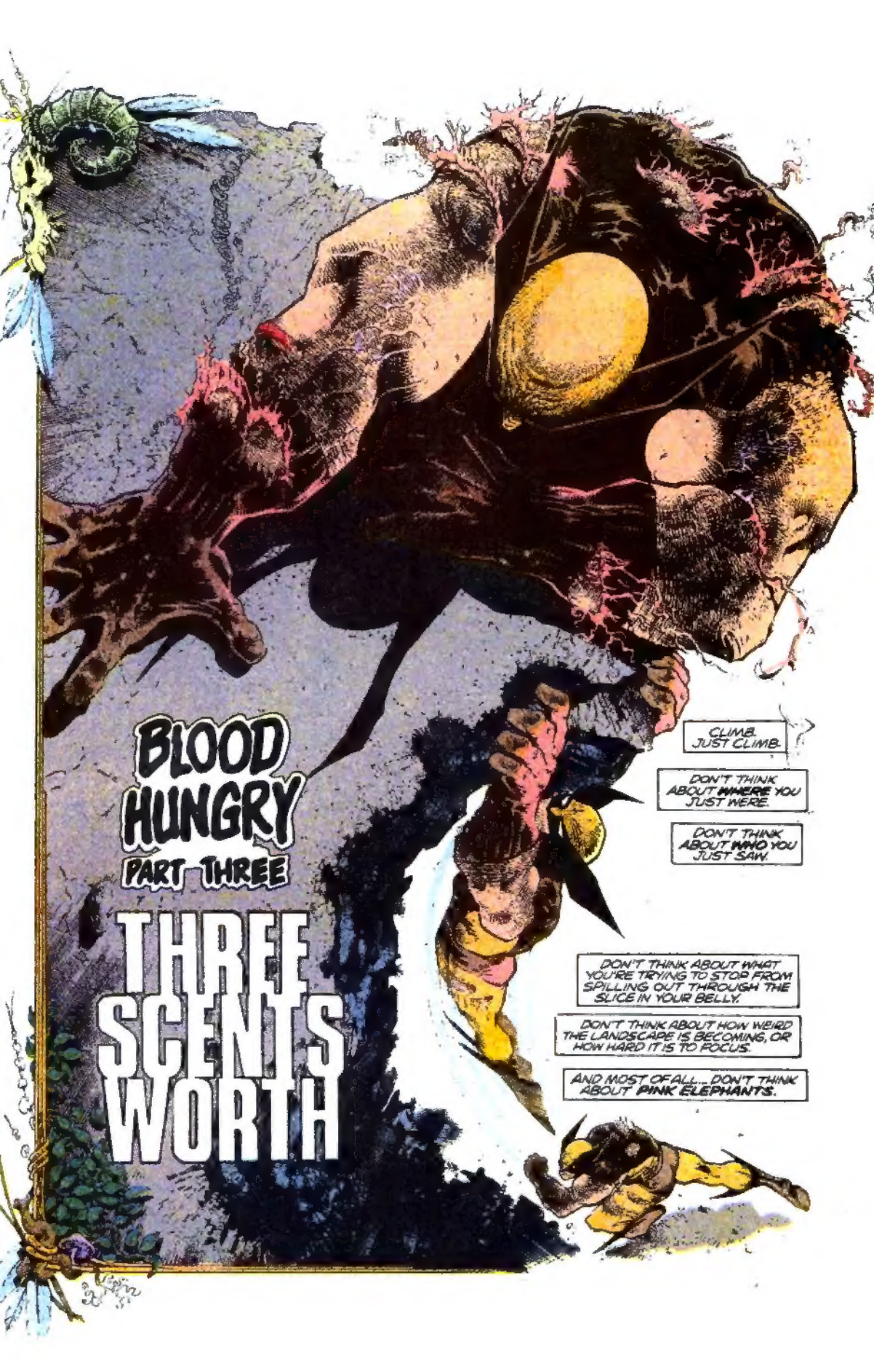
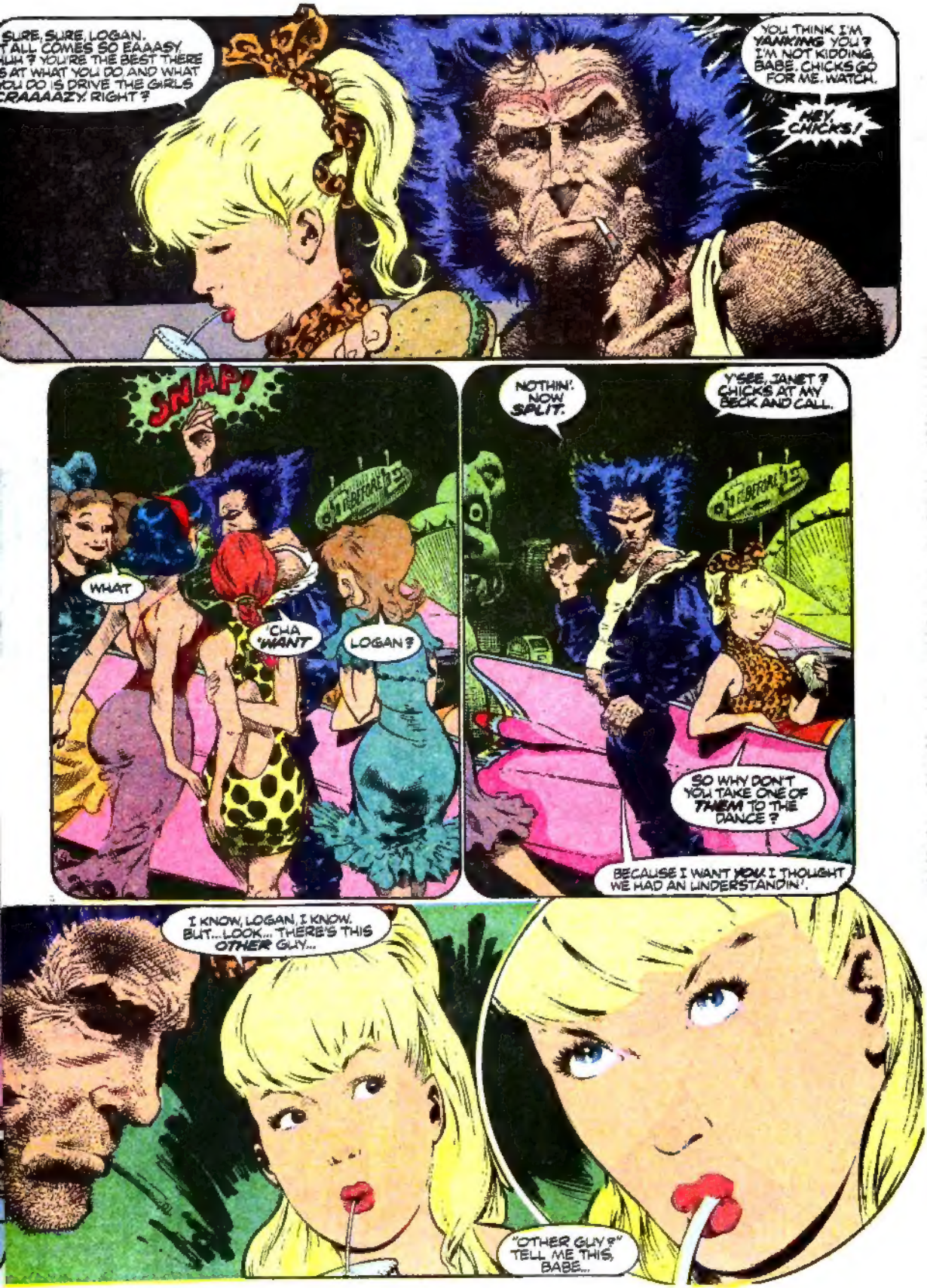

BLOOD HUNGRY
PART THREE
THREE SCENTS WORTH
CLIMB. JUST CLIMB.
DON'T THINK ABOUT WHERE YOU JUST WERE.
DON'T THINK ABOUT WHO YOU JUST SAW.
DON'T THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'RE TRYING TO STOP FROM SPILLING OUT THROUGH THE SLICE IN YOUR BELLY.
DON'T THINK ABOUT HOW WEIRD THE LANDSCAPE IS BECOMING, OR HOW HARD IT IS TO FOCUS.
AND MOST OF ALL... DON'T THINK ABOUT PINK ELEPHANTS.

THE HIGHER THE SUN CREEPS OVER THE HORIZON, THE LOWER MY HOPES ARE SINKING.
ALL I ASKED LOGAN TO DO WAS SPY ON GENERAL COY, AND FIND OUT WHO HIS NEW DRUG DEALINGS ARE WITH. BUT LOGAN SHOULD HAVE BEEN BACK BY NOW. HE MUST HAVE ENCOUNTERED SOMETHING...
...UNEXPECTED.
GOOD MORNING, TIGER TYGER.
YOU WEREN'T EXPECTING ME.
YES AND NO.
TEA?
ANY EARL GREY?
I'LL HAVE SOME SENT UP.

COLD.
SO...SO COLD.
PUSSYCAT... FOLLOWED ME FROM... FROM COY'S PLACE...
CAT, I'M WHIPPED.
ANYTHING... NOT TO SEE CHIBER... AGAIN...
JUST...JUST STAY AWAY.
LET ME... BLEED TO DEATH... IN PEACE...
ALL THESE YEARS... HAUNTED MY NIGHTMARES... NEVER TOLD ANYONE.
NOT THE PUSSY... NOT THE WOLF... JUST... FOOD FOR THOUGHT...
FOOD...

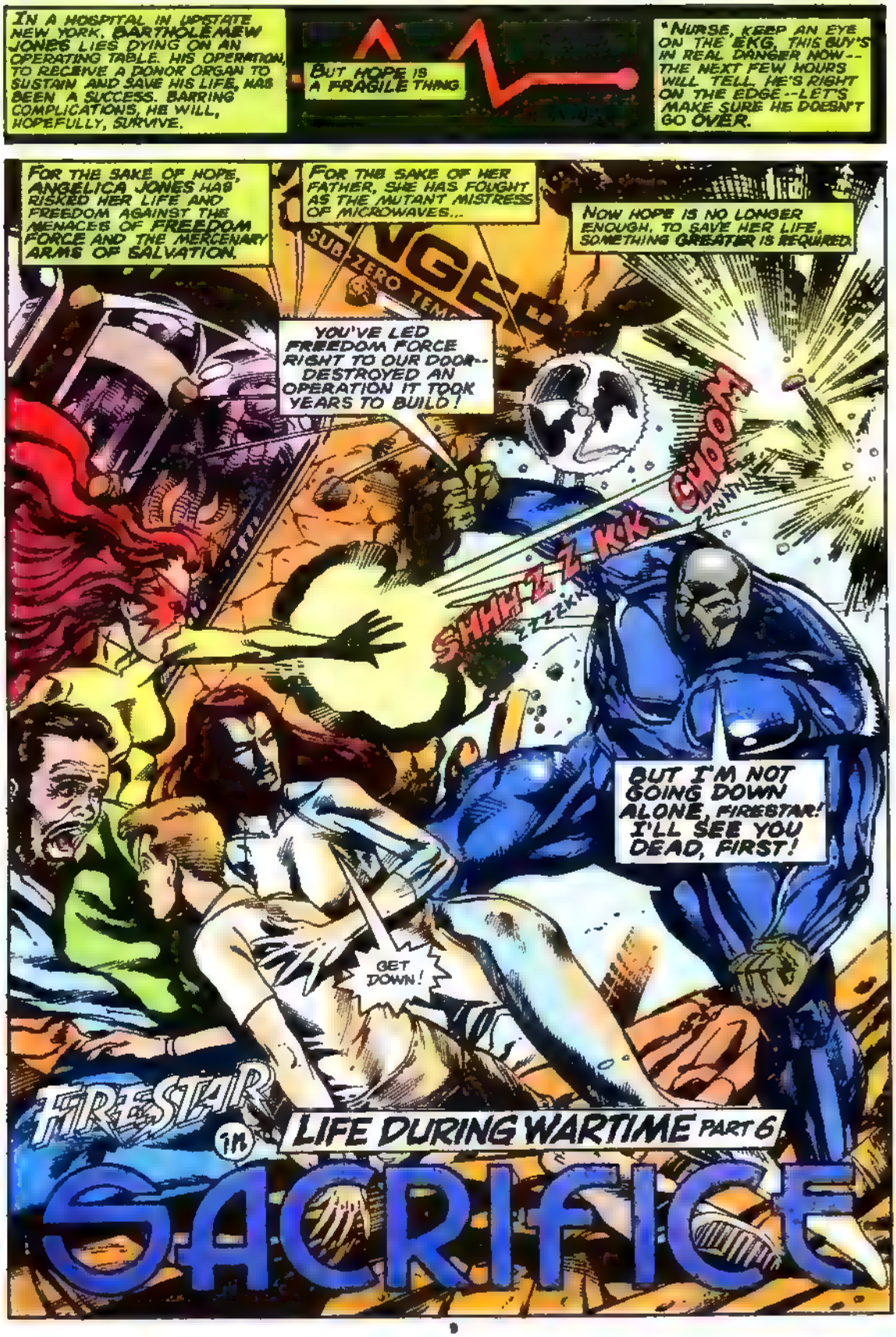
IMAGES.
EUPHEMISMS.
METAPHORS.
REALITY BLENDS WITH UNREALITY. FABRICATION
TRUTH IN FICTION.
FICTION IN TRUTH.
I RECALL WHAT HAPPENED YEARS AGO, EXCEPT IT WAS TO SOMEONE ELSE WHO IT HAPPENED.
ALL I KNOW FOR SURE IS THAT NONE OF THIS EVER HAPPENED.
SO, JANET...
WHAT'S IT GONNA BE WITH YOU?
YOU GOING WITH ME TO THE DANCE OR NOT?
I MEAN I'M NOT USED TO TAKING THIS KIND OF STUFF FROM CHICKS.


SURE, SURE, LOGAN. T ALL COMES SO EAAASY UH? YOU'RE THE BEST THERE S AT WHAT YOU DO AND WHAT OU DO IS DRIVE THE GIRLS CRAAAAZY. RIGHT?
YOU THINK I'M YANKING YOU? I'M NOT KIDDING, BABE. CHICKS GO FOR ME. WATCH.
HEY, CHICKS!
SNAP!
WHAT
CHA WANT
LOGAN?
NOTHIN'. NOW SPLIT.
Y'SEE, JANET? CHICKS AT MY BECK AND CALL.
SO WHY DON'T YOU TAKE ONE OF THEM TO THE DANCE?
BECAUSE I WANT YOU. I THOUGHT WE HAD AN UNDERSTANDIN'.
I KNOW, LOGAN. I KNOW. BUT...LOOK... THERE'S THIS OTHER GUY...
"OTHER GUY?" TELL ME THIS, BABE...

THIS OTHER GUY GOT A SET OF THESE?
WHOA! COOL! WHERE'DJA GET 'EM?!
THE BODY SHOP.
THEY'RE SO SHINY, I CAN SEE MY REFLECTION.
I KEEP 'EM POLISHED WITH MEADOWEX; IT'S LIKE WINDEX, BUT IT'S FOR WEAPONS. TAKES DRIED BLOOD RIGHT OFF.
THAT IS SOOOO WICKED.
SO ANSWER ME. DOES THIS OTHER GUY HAVE NASTY CLAWS, OR ADAMANTIUM-LACED BONES?
WELL... NOOO...
THEN WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL WITH HIM?
LOGAN...HE'S NOT JUST ONE OF THE GUYS. HE'S A TEACHER.

A TEACHER—HE ISN'T SUPPOSED TO BE HITTING ON STUDENTS!
WHO IS HE? C'MON, SPILL..
THE GYM TEACHER, MR. CYPHER.
OH, GREAT! THOSE THAT CAN, DO. THOSE THAT CAN'T TEACH. AND THOSE THAT CAN'T TEACH, TEACH GYM!
WELL I'M GONNA PUT A STOP TO THAT!
...PUT...A STOP...TO THAT...TAKE HIM...OUT OF...THE PICTURE...

I'VE BEEN TO GENERAL COY WITH A BUSINESS PROPOSITION. HE HAS OFFERED ME A PRICE FOR CERTAIN GOODS I HAVE TO SELL. I AM CURIOUS AS TO COUNTER OFFERS YOU MIGHT MAKE.
IF THIS IS REGARDING DRUGS, I'M AFRAID I'LL HAVE TO JUST SAY NO.
NOT JUST ANY DRUG. A DRUG SO POWERFUL THAT YOU CAN BECOME ADDICTED TO IT JUST BY SMELLING IT.
A HALLUCINOGENIC. VERY POWERFUL. DISTORTS YOUR PAST AND ALTERS YOUR PRESENT AND FUTURE.
MORE THAN JUST A RECREATIONAL DRUG. JUDICIOUSLY PLACED, IT CAN PUT SOMEONE IN A TREMENDOUS POSITION OF POWER.
WHY, SUCH A DRUG COULD UNSEAT CRIMINAL RIVALS...EVEN...
...PRINCES.
WHAT DID YOU SAY YOUR NAME WAS?
NICE TEA.
TO BE CONTINUED...


IN A HOSPITAL IN UPSTATE NEW YORK, BARTHOLEMEW JONES LIES DYING ON AN OPERATING TABLE. HIS OPERATION, TO RECEIVE A DONOR ORGAN TO SUSTAIN AND SAVE HIS LIFE, HAS BEEN A SUCCESS. BARRING COMPLICATIONS, HE WILL, HOPEFULLY, SURVIVE.
BUT HOPE IS A FRAGILE THING
"NURSE, KEEP AN EYE ON THE EKG, THIS GUY'S IN REAL DANGER NOW--THE NEXT FEW HOURS WILL TELL. HE'S RIGHT ON THE EDGE--LET'S MAKE SURE HE DOESN'T GO OVER.
FOR THE SAKE OF HOPE, ANGELICA JONES HAS RISKED HER LIFE AND FREEDOM AGAINST THE MENACES OF FREEDOM FORCE AND THE MERCENARY ARMS OF SALVATION.
FOR THE SAKE OF HER FATHER, SHE HAS FOUGHT AS THE MUTANT MISTRESS OF MICROWAVES...
NOW HOPE IS NO LONGER ENOUGH. TO SAVE HER LIFE, SOMETHING GREATER IS REQUIRED.
SUB-ZERO TEMP
YOU'VE LED FREEDOM FORCE RIGHT TO OUR DOOR--DESTROYED AN OPERATION IT TOOK YEARS TO BUILD!
KOO
CHOO
ZZNNTH!
SHHH'Z Z KK
ZZZKK
BUT I'M NOT GOING DOWN ALONE, FIRESTAR! I'LL SEE YOU DEAD, FIRST!
GET DOWN!
FIRESTAR
IN
LIFE DURING WARTIME PART 6
SACRIFICE

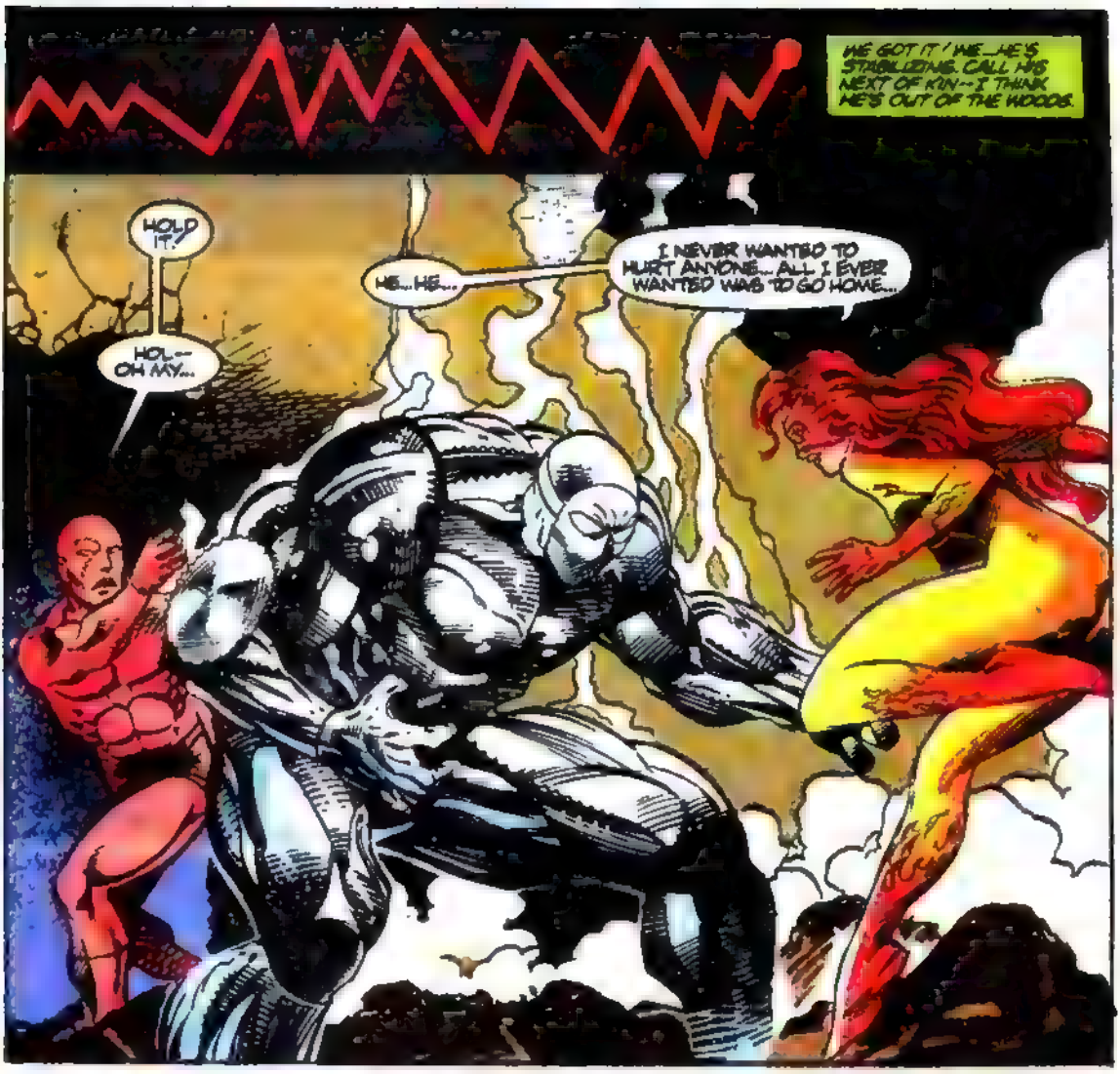
E.K.G. IRREGULAR ...BP DOWN -- MAYBE SOME INTERNAL BLEEDING! PREP HIM BACK FOR O.R. --
...STUPID, STUPID! FITCH AND CROSS FED ME A LINE—PROMISING TO GET THE DONOR ORGAN DADDY NEEDS TO SURVIVE... CUTTING THROUGH RED TAPE.
AND I SWALLOWED IT! HAD NO IDEA THEY GOT THEIR "DONATIONS" FROM LIVING VICTIMS!
NO IDEA I WAS HELPING A GANG OF MERCENARY MURDERERS.
I EVEN BROUGHT THEM MYSTIQUE-- LET MY ANGER AT HER FREEDOM FORCE'S CAUSING MY FATHER'S IN-JURY CLOUD... DESTROY MY JUDGMENT!
ALL THE WHILE, CROSS HAD DESIGNED ARMOR TO COUNTER MY POWERS! A WEAPON I'M USELESS AGAINST!
I WARNED YOU, LITTLE GIRL--
NOW I'VE LET EVERY-BODY DOWN...
A FRAGILE THING...
--ULLLL!!
WHA TH?!
WHAMM!
AH-AH, CHUNKY! WHY DON'T YOU ROLL OVER TO THE CORNER LIKE A NICE PUPPY --THE ONLY ONE WHOSE BLADES WILL DRINK FIRESTAR'S BLOOD TODAY'LL BE--
SPIRAL!!
THAT'S RIGHT, PRINCESS! I'VE BEEN TELEPORTING ALL OVER THIS COMPLEX, LOOKING FOR YOU—OR THE BOSS-LADY, MYSTIQUE! LOOKS LIKE I'VE HIT THE JACKPOT!

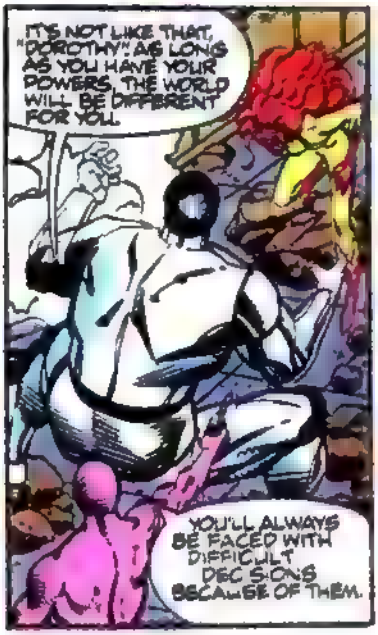
CODE BLUE--HE'S GOING INTO FIBRILLATION--GET ME A SHOCKER IN HERE, STAT! THIS MAY GET UGLY...
OH, SO THIS IS TO BE A CONTEST, IS IT? TO THE WINNER GOES THE SPOILED BRAT?
THE ONE WITH THE BIGGEST MAD-ON WINS? BEAUTY
BUT BE WARNED, NO CREATURE THAT LIVES KNOWS MORE HATE THAN I--ON THIS WORLD, OR ANY OTHER
SS
WSHHHH
SPIRAL! DISPATCH HIM AND HELP FIRESTAR! WE'VE GOT TO GET TO THE CIVILIANS...
I'LL HELP HER MYSTIQUE--GET YOUR CHARGES OUT OF HERE
AND LEAVE THE PRINCESS TRAPPED AT THE FAR SIDE OF OUR BATTLE!
BUT SHE WON'T BE LONELY FOR LONG...
RESPONSIBILITY IS A HARD AND HEAVY THING. AS LEADER OF FREEDOM FORCE, MYSTIQUE KNOWS HOW IT CAN CRUSH HOPE, LEAVING ONLY THE BAREST, STARK REALITY.
WITH TWO LIVES IN HER HANDS, SHE KNOWS SHE MUST LEAVE FIRESTAR TO THE TENDER MERCIES OF THE VICTOR, THOUGH IT BREAKS HER WARRIOR'S SOUL.
IF ONLY
STOP RIGHT THERE!
LOOK--THIS WHOLE OPERATION IS COMING DOWN AT YOUR HANDS. I CAN SEE THAT--ALL I WANT NOW IS TO GET OUT ALIVE!
AND I DON'T CARE WHO I'VE GOTTA KILL--AND YOU'RE GOING TO HELP ME...
A FRAGILE THING

STAND BY! READY--CLEAR!
AGAIN--CLEAR!
NICE MOVES, OVERALL, BUT LACKING IN GRACE.
SWISSH
CHOOM
ALL POWER, NO TECHNIQUE. I'M AFRAID MY DANCE MAY BE TOO MUCH FOR YOU.
BESIDES, I LIKE TO LEAD.
SWISSH
CHOK!
YOU CUT MY ARMOR, YOU--!
GRAAAA!
CHOOM
SWISSH
MY EYES!
IT'S CALLED FREON, BABE! ONE OF THE MANY FREEZING CHEMICALS WE KEEP ON HAND TO KEEP PARTS ON ICE.
VERY BAD FOR YOU--BUT NOT AS BAD AS THIS!
KRAK
KOOOM
UNGN!

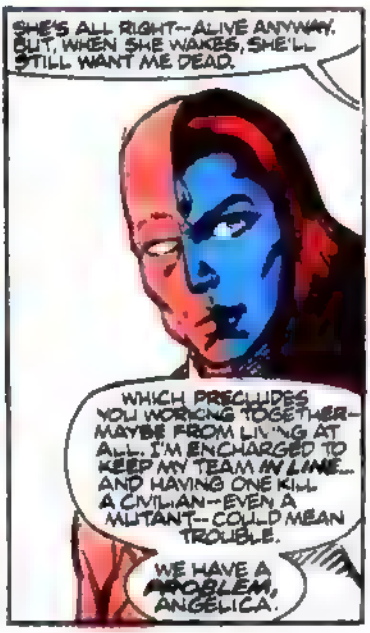
READY CLEAR
BLAST IT--DON'T DIE ON US!
ONCE MORE--
HAHAHAHAHAHA!
MYSTIQUE GOT AWAY--BUT YOU'LL SERVE JUST AS WELL AS A SHIELD, SPIRAL. ONCE YOU'VE BEEN PACIFIED BY A SNAPPED SPINE!
NOOOO!
ZZLAAKK
EYAARR!
YOU LITTLE ..
THOUGHT YOU'D BE LONG GONE BY NOW, CHICKEN.
YOUR MISTAKE
ALMOST GONE ...ALMOST MADE IT OUT!
BUT I COULDN'T JUST RUN OUT--LEAVE SPIRAL LIKE THAT.
...AND NOW I'VE REALLY STEPPED IN IT!
HAHAHAHA!
WHY BOTHER, CHICKEN? EVEN WITH THE SYSTEM DAMAGE FROM SPIRAL, MY INTERNAL COOLING SYSTEMS ARE ENOUGH TO COUNTER YOUR POWER!
DARN, HE'S RIGHT! I'M HEATING HIS ARMOR TO NEAR MELTING.. AND HE'S COUNTERING--SUPER COOLING FROM WITHIN!
ZRRAAK

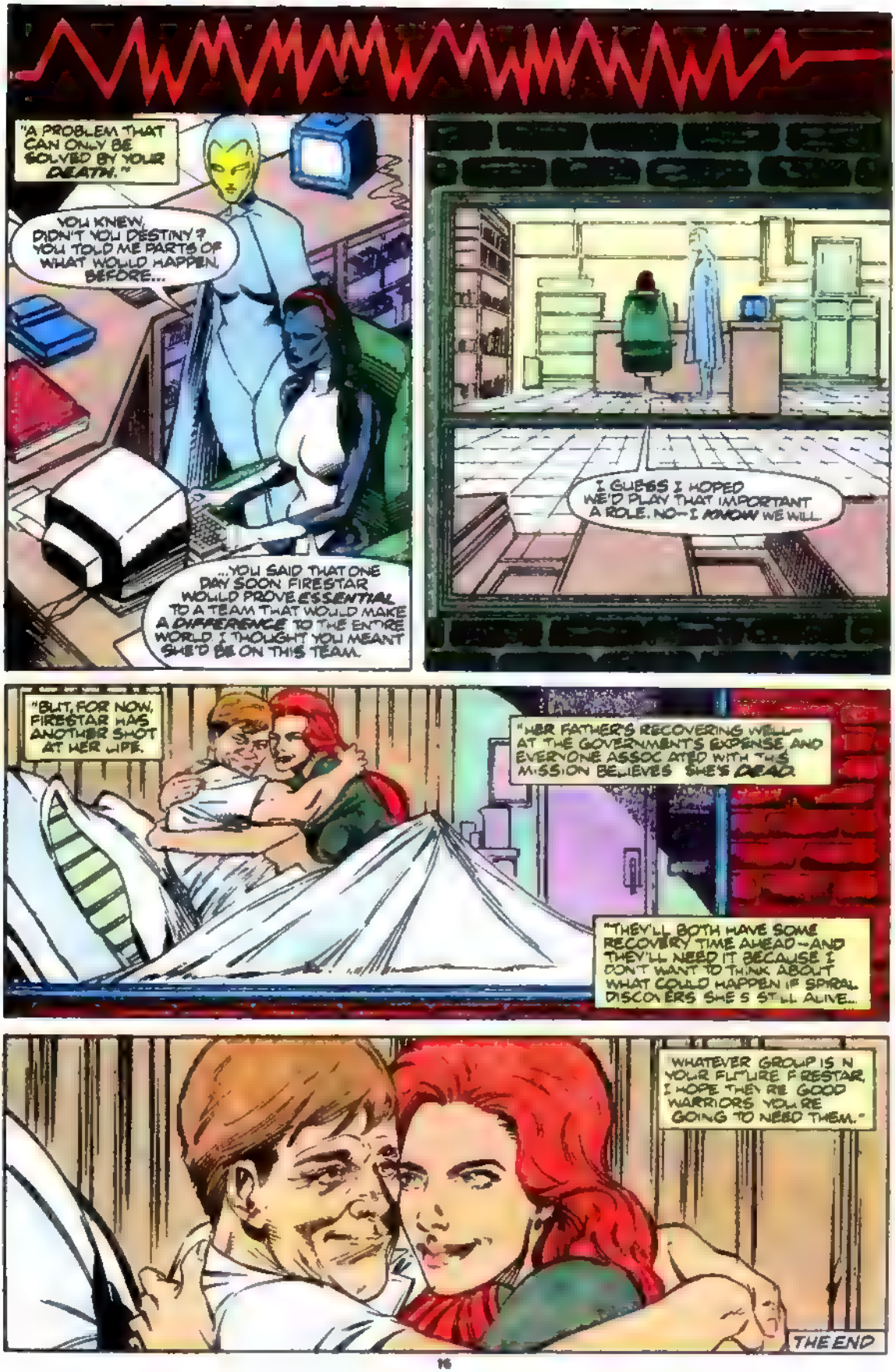
CLEAR!
A FRAGILE THING...
HE... HE GOT SOMETHING
DANGER
-128 ZERO TEMP
SUPER-COOLING FROM WITHIN...
...THAT'S IT.
HIS SYSTEMS ARE DESIGNED TO COUNTER HEAT—LET'S SEE HOW THEY PLAY AGAINST...
...COLD!
EEEEEEEEEEEEERRRRRRRRRRRRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA--K
SSSS


WE GOT IT / WE...HE'S STABILIZING. CALL HIS NEXT OF KIN--I THINK HE'S OUT OF THE WOODS.
HOLD IT.
HOL--OH MY...
HE...HE...
I NEVER WANTED TO HURT ANYONE... ALL I EVER WANTED WAS TO GO HOME...


IT'S NOT LIKE THAT, "DOROTHY." AS LONG AS YOU HAVE YOUR POWERS, THE WORLD WILL BE DIFFERENT FOR YOU.
YOU'LL ALWAYS BE FACED WITH DIFFICULT DECISIONS BECAUSE OF THEM.

..YOU'D BETTER EITHER LEARN TO USE THEM--OR SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES OF HIDING FROM THEM. I LEARNED THAT LONG AGO.
AND I JUST TAUGHT THAT TO CROSS'S PARTNER, FITCH IN THE HALL--BEFORE DOUBLING BACK TO DEFROST SPIRAL.
YOUR FRIENDS ARE SAFE--SPIRAL?


SHE'S ALL RIGHT--ALIVE ANYWAY. BUT, WHEN SHE WAKES, SHE'LL STILL WANT ME DEAD.
WHICH PRECLUDES YOU WORKING TOGETHER--MAYBE FROM LIVING AT ALL. I'M ENCHARGED TO KEEP MY TEAM IN LINE... AND HAVING ONE KILL A CIVILIAN--EVEN A MUTANT--COULD MEAN TROUBLE.
WE HAVE A PROBLEM, ANGELICA.


"A PROBLEM THAT CAN ONLY BE SOLVED BY YOUR DEATH."
YOU KNEW, DIDN'T YOU DESTINY? YOU TOLD ME PARTS OF WHAT WOULD HAPPEN BEFORE...
...YOU SAID THAT ONE DAY SOON FIRESTAR WOULD PROVE ESSENTIAL TO A TEAM THAT WOULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO THE ENTIRE WORLD. I THOUGHT YOU MEANT SHE'D BE ON THIS TEAM.
I GUESS I HOPED WE'D PLAY THAT IMPORTANT A ROLE. NO--I KNOW WE WILL.
"BUT, FOR NOW, FIRESTAR HAS ANOTHER SHOT AT HER LIFE.
"HER FATHER'S RECOVERING WELL-- AT THE GOVERNMENT'S EXPENSE AND EVERYONE ASSOCIATED WITH THIS MISSION BELIEVES SHE'S DEAD.
"THEY'LL BOTH HAVE SOME RECOVERY TIME AHEAD--AND THEY'LL NEED IT BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO THINK ABOUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN IF SPIRAL DISCOVERS SHE'S STILL ALIVE...
"WHATEVER GROUP IS IN YOUR FUTURE, FIRESTAR, I HOPE THEY'RE GOOD WARRIORS. YOU'RE GOING TO NEED THEM."
THE END

MOST VISITING LUMINARIES RECEIVE A KEY TO THE CITY.
MOI? I'M IN BRUSSELS FOR WHAT--THIRTY SECONDS?-- AND I'M UNDER ATTACK BY SOME THIRD-RATE SUPER ARRAGEIN.
IMAGINE, I ONCE DREAMED OF GIVING UP THE LIFE OF A FAMED COSTUMED ADVENTURER--
--TO DWELL FOREVER AMIDST THE RELATIVE CALM OF TEST TUBES AND MICRO-SCOPES AS A RESEARCH SCIENTIST.
WHAT WAS I THINKING?
JUST FRIENDS
PART THREE
"IF IT'S TUESDAY, THIS MUST BE BELGIUM"

YOU OBVIOUSLY WEREN'T THINKING ABOUT THE CONSTRICTOR!
OTHERWISE YOU WOULDN'T HAVE COME ALL THE WAY TO BRUSSELS JUST TO DIE.
AIN'T IT A LITTLE EARLY IN THE DAY FOR DEATH THREATS?
EARLY?! IT'S NEARLY NOON!
I'M STILL ON NEW YORK TIME
COULD YOU GIVE ME A MOMENT TO CHECK IN, GRAB A SHOWER--A BITE TO EAT?
DR. HENRY McCOY
I GUESSED, BUMBLE
I'M ALL FOR WRAPPING THIS UP QUICKLY, DOC.
I GET PAYED BY THE CORPSE, NOT BY THE HOUR.
DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH?
-DUCK!
VERY GOOD, SIR
BECAUSE I'M NOT SURE OF THE FRENCH WORD FOR--
OF COURSE, SIR. WHY DO YOU ASK?
GLAD YOU'RE HAVING FUN.
HERE YOU GO--
HEY, CONSTRICTOR--HEADS UP!
I GOTTA TELL YOU, THIS IS FUN!
I'M USED TO KILLING SOUTH AMERICAN DRUG LORDS OR NEW YORK MOBSTERS.
IT'S A BLAST TO OFF SOMEONE WITH A SENSE OF HUMOR.
SLAM
ULP!
DON'T TELL ME--THAT WAS CONSTRICTOR'ESE FOR "A CHANDELIER HAS FALLEN ON ME. AND I CAN'T GET UP!"

204...205...206...
I WONDER IF SHE'S HERE YET
WHAT IF SHE IS HERE?
WHAT AM I GOING TO SAY?
"HI. YOU DON'T REMEMBER ME. WE USED TO BE BEST FRIENDS--
--BUT A GOOD CHUNK OF YOUR MIND WAS ERASED FOR THE SAFETY OF THE HUMAN RACE, AND I'M HERE TO APOLOGIZE."
MAYBE I SHOULD HAVE THOUGHT THIS OUT A LITTLE MORE BEFORE I LEFT NEW YORK.
EMPTY.
206
THAT JENNIFER WOULD BE STANDING THERE WITH OPEN ARMS?
"OF COURSE I FORGIVE YOU, HANK. I KNOW YOU LOVED ME.
"I REALIZE IT WAS PROFESSOR X'S IDEA TO ERASE MY MEMORIES.
"I DON'T BLAME YOU."
DREAM ON, DR. MCCOY.
OF COURSE IT'S EMPTY. WHAT WAS I EXPECTING?
EH? A REMINDER FROM THE SYMPOSIUM.
JENNIFER--DID I HAVE A MISSION COMING HERE?
SHOULD I HAVE JUST LEFT THINGS THE WAY THEY WERE?
I JUST WANT TO SEE YOU AGAIN.
MAYBE THAT'S NOT TRUE.
MAYBE I CAME LOOKING FOR... FORGIVENESS?
BL KLAM!
ROOM SERVICE!
ADAMANTIUM COILS?!

I DIDN'T ORDER ANY ADAMANTIUM COILS.
AREN'T YOU GOING TO ASK ME HOW I SURVIVED THE CHANDELIER?
NO
IT WAS KEVLAR. MY BODY ARMOR IS MADE OF KEVLAR.
SPLINTER
WOW
I'M IMPRESSED
I HAVEN'T BATTLED A SUPER-VILLAIN IN KEVLAR BODY ARMOR IN ABOUT A WEEK.
WE'RE GOING TO HAVE TO PICK UP THE PACE.
I'M DUE AT THE SCIENTISTS' COCKTAIL PARTY IN TWENTY MINUTES.
YOU DON'T SEEM TO UNDERSTAND--I'VE BEEN PAID A LOT OF MONEY TO KILL YOU.
YOU MIGHT WANT TO PHONE YOUR BOSS.
THERE'S STILL TIME TO STOP THE
THAT'S IT, MR SMARTY MUTANT--
--YOU'VE JUST TOLD YOUR LAST JOKE!
SKRAGH!
SLAMM!
I CAN'T RESIST I GOTTA TAKE A PEEK
HE MUST LOOK LIKE A BLUE FRISBEE ON THE SIDEWALK.
PSSSST.
EH?
BOP!
ALWAYS LOOK UP
FIRST RULE AND I FORGOT IT
LWAYS LOOK UP

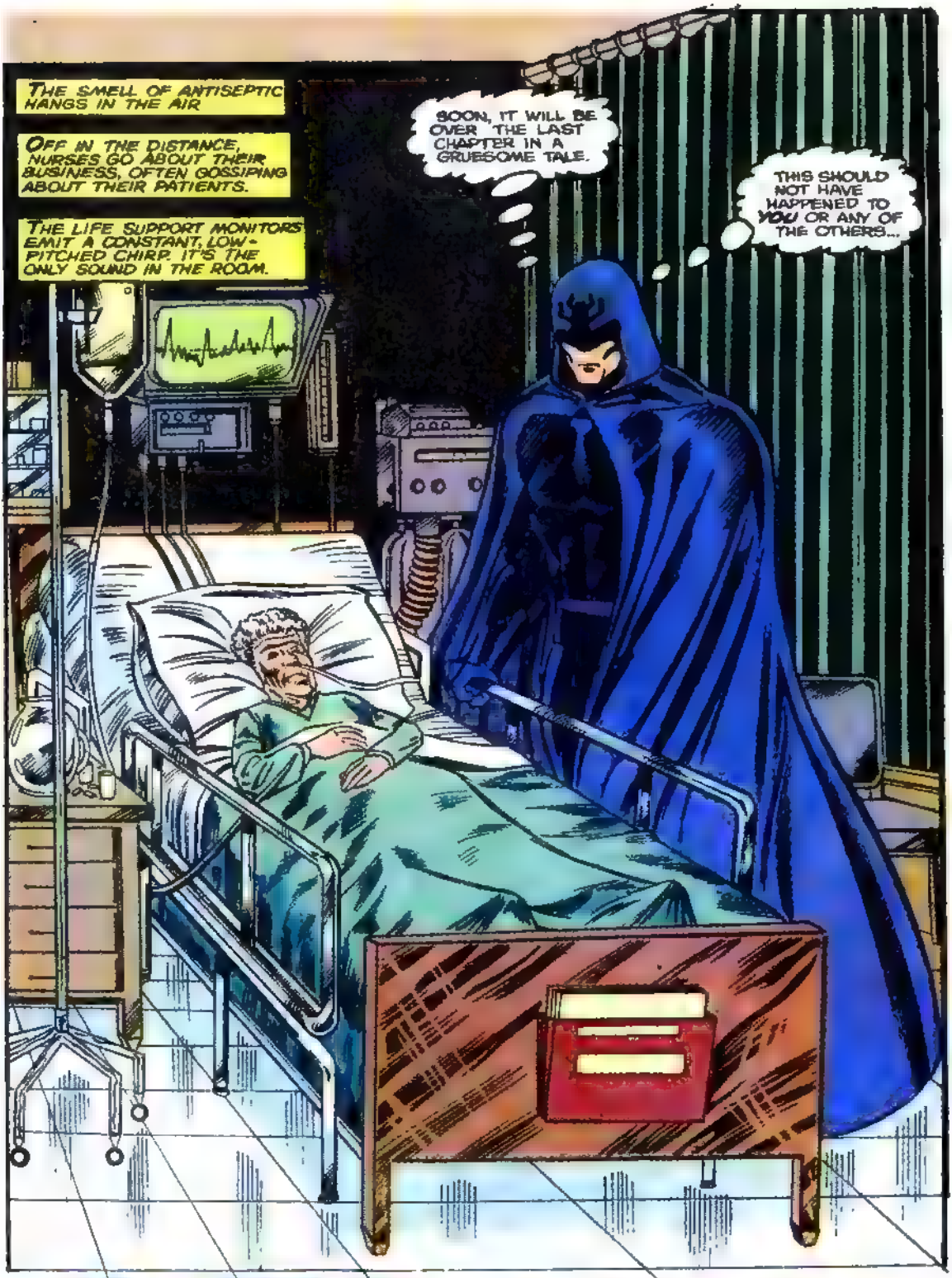
OVER THE YEARS, THE PROF'S MIND CONTROL FADED.
IS IT ASKING TOO MUCH THAT JENNIFER IS ONE OF THOSE WHO REMEMBER--?
PAVEL?
WHO--?
NO. YOU'RE NOT PAVEL.
I'M SORRY. I MISTOOK YOU FOR AN OLD FRIEND.
G'LRIGHT I GET THAT A LOT
I RECOGNIZE HIM! HE'S DR. IVAN KRAGOFF -- THE RED GHOST!
CAN THAT PALE, SICKLY OLD MAN BE THE LEADER OF THE SUPER APES?
HE LOOKED HORRIBLE.
FACT IS--
--HE LOOKED LIKE HE WAS...
...DYING?
GOTCHA!
LET'S SEE HOW HARD YOU LAUGH WHEN I SHOOT YOU UP WITH 25,000 VOLTS OF ELECTRICITY!
LOOK, AT FIRST THIS WAS FUN.
A WAY TO UNWIND AFTER A LONG FLIGHT
BUT HERE IS WHERE WE SEPARATE THE BOYS FROM THE MEN!
OW!
I COULD HAVE LIVED MY ENTIRE LIFE WITHOUT HEARING THAT PUN!
SLAM!
IMAGINE HOW I FEEL.

TOO BAD I'M NOT GETTING PAID BY THE DOORS I SPLINTER.
I'D HAVE ENOUGH TO RETIRE ON FOR THIS ONE ASSIGNMENT!
BUT AS IT IS, THE RED GHOST IS PAYING ME TO KILL AN AVENGER.
DID YOU SAY THE RED GHOST?!
YEAH, YOU KNOW--THE SOVIET SCIENTIST? THE OLD FANTASTIC FOUR VILLAIN
YES, I KNOW WHO HE IS. BUT I JUST SAW HIM A MOMENT AGO--HE DIDN'T SAY WORD ONE ABOUT WANTING ME DEAD.
DEAD IS DEAD-- IT DON'T MATTER WHO'S PAYING THE BILL.
NOW HOLD STILL-- LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH.
YES
LET'S
AN AQUARIUM?
--FILLED WITH WATER.
ABOUT TEN GALLONS BY MY ESTIMATION.
SHOULD BE JUST ENOUGH TO SHORT-CIRCUIT THAT ELECTRICALLY-CHARGED SUIT OF YOURS.
ZZZTTNK
NOOOOOOO!
KEVLAR, HUH?
DID I MENTION HOW IMPRESSED I WAS?

MOMENTS LATER...
<I CAN'T WAIT TO GET TO MY ROOM AND RELAX.*>
<AFTER BEING STUCK NEXT TO THAT...MAN FOR THREE HOURS!>
<LET'S SEE, 209...>
<...209...>
* TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH --T.K.
<2...>
<...0...>
<...7...>
<I KNEW I SHOULD HAVE STAYED AT THE HOLIDAY INN!>
AT THAT MOMENT...
SOME OF THE MOST BRILLIANT RESEARCH SCIENTISTS IN THE WORLD ARE HERE TONIGHT.
AND THEY DON'T COME ANY SMARTER THAN DR. JENNIFER NYLEE.
AFTER ALL THESE YEARS, IT'S STILL DIFFICULT TO FIND A TUX THAT FITS.
THIS IS IT. THE MOMENT OF TRUTH.
DR. HENRY McCOY, ISN'T IT?
I'M LT. COMMANDER COURAGE.
I'M SURE YOU KNOW DR. NYLEE*
NO. I DON'T BELIEVE WE'VE EVER MET.
IT'S--
IT'S...
...A PLEASURE.
KRASH!

WHA--TWO OF THE SUPER APES?! I SHALL--
--UGNH!?
WAK!
DIDN'T I SEE YOU GUYS AT THE SALON THE OTHER DAY?
NO SENSE JOKING WITH THESE MONKEYS. THE GORILLA IS SUPER STRONG.
THE ORANGUTAN SHOOTS ELECTRICITY.
THAT LEAVES THE CHIMP--THE SHAPE-CHANGER. AT LEAST HE'S NOT HERE.
WHA--?!
SPOKE TOO SOON
SEEING JENNIFER AGAIN DISTRACTED ME
I'M ACTING LIKE AN AMATEUR.
BETTER GET MY ACT TOGETHER BEFORE--
--TOO LATE
BEING ZAPPED BY ORANGUTAN.
"KIDNAPPING JEN."
MUST.
SAVE.

CONTINUED NEXT ISSUE...


THE SMELL OF ANTISEPTIC HANGS IN THE AIR
OFF IN THE DISTANCE, NURSES GO ABOUT THEIR BUSINESS, OFTEN GOSSIPING ABOUT THEIR PATIENTS.
THE LIFE SUPPORT MONITORS EMIT A CONSTANT, LOW-PITCHED CHIRP. IT'S THE ONLY SOUND IN THE ROOM.
SOON, IT WILL BE OVER. THE LAST CHAPTER IN A GRUESOME TALE.
THIS SHOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED TO YOU OR ANY OF THE OTHERS...

THE SHROUD IN "TO TOUCH THE DARKNESS"

TWO DAYS AGO...
THE BRUTAL ATTACKS AGAINST LOS ANGELES' SENIOR CITIZEN POPULATION CONTINUED TODAY--
--WHEN MISS BETTY STEIN, AGE SIXTY-EIGHT, WAS ATTACKED WHILE WALKING HER DOG. SHE WAS HOSPITALIZED WITH NUMEROUS INTERNAL INJURIES.
SHE IS THE FOURTH VICTIM THIS MONTH AND THE MOST SERIOUSLY INJURED. POLICE SUSPECT THE SAME GANG.
ZAAKKK!
CRASH
HA! SOON WE'RE GONNA BE KINGS OF THE CITY--
--AND NO ONE'S GONNA STOP US!
HUH?
=ULP= THE SHROUD!
HELLO MANNY. SNATCH ANY PURSES LATELY?
NAH, I'VE MOVED UP IN THE WORLD.

WHAT DO YOU CARE? YOU'RE JUST AS CROOKED AS THE REST OF US.
THAT'S RIGHT -- AND YOU'RE IN MY TERRITORY. NOTHING GOES DOWN WITHOUT MY SAY SO.
I KNOW YOU AND YOUR BOYS ARE THE ONES ATTACKING THE ELDERLY. I WANT THAT TO STOP NOW.
I WANT TO DISCUSS A SOLUTION YOU PICK THE TIME AND THE PLACE.
I DON'T KNOW... THE GUYS ARE HAVING A LOT OF FUN, AND WE'RE GONNA START SELLING OUR PROTECTION TO THE PEOPLE IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD.
MAYBE I HAVEN'T MADE MYSELF CLEAR. IF YOU DON'T DEAL WITH ME, I AND MY FORCES WILL HUNT YOU DOWN, AND YOU WILL REGRET IT FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE.
OKAY, TAKE IT EASY. BE AT WAREHOUSE 22 ON PIER 11 TONIGHT AT TWELVE.
IT PAYS TO HARBOR THE REPUTATION OF A CRIMELORD. THE SLIME COME TO YOU.
I'LL BE THERE
SHEESH! HE GIVES ME THE CREEPS.

THE PRESENT...
≥COUGH≤ WHO'S THERE?
OH, IT'S YOU. YOU'VE COME BACK AGAIN TO ≥COUGH≤ WAIT WITH ME ≥COUGH≤
YES. WOULD YOU LIKE SOME WATER?
PLEASE.
DRINK SLOWLY.
A FEW MINUTES LATER, AND BETTY HAS FALLEN BACK INTO A FITFUL SLEEP...
I KEEP ASKING MYSELF WHY I'M HERE. I GUESS THE SIMPLE ANSWER IS BECAUSE I NEED TO BE.
IN MY GUISE AS A CRIME-LORD, I BATTLE THE CRIMINALS FROM WITHIN. IT'S WHAT I'VE SWORN MYSELF TO DO.
I AM ISOLATED FROM OTHER PEOPLE. THERE IS NO ROOM IN MY LIFE FOR ATTACHMENTS.
I GUESS THE FACT THAT BETTY STEIN HAS NO FAMILY STRUCK A CHORD WITH ME.
NO ONE WAS THERE FOR ME WHEN MY PARENTS WERE MURDERED. AT LEAST I CAN BE HERE FOR BETTY.

THE WAREHOUSE-- MIDNIGHT...
CRIPES! HOW'D THE SHROUD GET IN HERE WITHOUT US SEEING HIM?
I DON'T KNOW. AND IT'S NOT GONNA MATTER IN A MINUTE.
MANNY LETS OUT TWO SHARP WHISTLES THE SIGNAL FOR--
ATTACK!
BEAT 'IM TO A PULP!
I DON'T KNOW HE LOOKS KINDA WEIRD.

WHOA! HE'S GONE.
UH, OH... I'VE GOT A BAD FEELING ABOUT THIS.
HE TRICKED US! I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT I'M GETTING OUT OF HERE BEFORE HE SHOWS UP FOR REAL.
YOU'RE TOO LATE--
I KNEW MANNY WOULD PULL A FAST ONE ON ME. GOOD THING MY DARKNESS DECOY FORCED HIM INTO MAKING THE FIRST MOVE.
--HE'S HERE.
GAACK!
THWACK
UNGH!
WAAPP
CRUNCH
OWWWW!
OOF!

I WON'T HURT YOU GUYS TOO MUCH--
WHAM
--JUST ENOUGH SO THAT YOU'LL REMEMBER IT-- AND BETTY STEIN. --FOR A LONG TIME.
WHACK
UNGH!
BAM
THIS IS THE LAST OF THEM EXCEPT MANNY AND HIS BUDDY--
--WHO SEEM TO HAVE TAKEN OFF.
GOOD THING I INVITED A COUPLE OF FRIENDS FROM NIGHT SHIFT ALONG.
PEEK-A--
--BOO!
CRIPES!
BEFORE THEY CAN DO ANYTHING, THE SHROUD CONSTRUCTS A BAND OF DARKNESS AROUND THEM.
HEY, KEEP IT AWAY FROM ME!
FORGET ABOUT THE DARKNESS. JUST KEEP THOSE MONSTERS AWAY FROM ME. I GIVE UP, MAN.

MORNING--A TIME FOR HELLOS AND GOODBYES...
ARE YOU HERE, MY FRIEND? THE SUN HURTS MY EYES.
I'M HERE, BETTY. THE SUN SHALL NOT BOTHER YOU NOW.
ONCE AGAIN THE SHROUD MANIFESTS HIS DARKNESS--NOT TO TRICK OR TO INTIMIDATE, BUT TO SOOTHE AND COMFORT.
THANK YOU, MY FRIEND. YOU'VE HELPED ME THROUGH THE PAIN, BUT I FEAR THAT YOUR PRESENCE CANNOT WARD OFF THE INEVITABLE.
AND WITH THOSE WORDS, BETTY STEIN DIED.
THERE WILL BE NO PUBLIC OUTCRY FOR HER PASSING, JUST A FEW LINES IN THE LOCAL PAPER.
BUT SHE WILL BE REMEMBERED BY HER NOW-IMPRISONED ATTACKERS AND BY THE EVER-VIGILANT SHROUD.
THE END.

THE FINAL FATE OF
FIRESTAR
THE SHROUD GOES FACE-TO-FACE WITH DEATH!
BEAST VS. THE CONSTRICTOR ...AND THEN THE TROUBLE BEGINS!
50 YEARS OF CAPTAIN AMERICA
1941-1991